TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Zoom
TRPA

September 25, 2024

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Chair Faustinos called the meeting to order at 9:51 a.m. on September 25, 2024.

Members present: Ms. Faustinos, Mr. Ferry, Ms. Hays, Ms. Conrad-Saydah, Mr. Settelmeyer and Mr. Rice.

Members absent: Ms. Williamson.

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Caringer stated no changes to the agenda.

Chair Faustinos deemed the agenda approved as posted.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Williamson moved approval of the draft September 25, 2024 EIP Committee meeting minutes as presented.

Motion carried by voice vote.

III. RESTORATION AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIC PRIORITY UPDATE

Kim Caringer, TRPA Deputy Director and Chief Partnerships Officer, began the presentation. Ms. Caringer began by expressing enthusiasm for the meeting, highlighting that it was the first gathering since March, following a trip to Washington, D.C. The team had since made significant progress on the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and broader environmental restoration and resilience efforts. She noted that this would be a joint presentation alongside Director Julie Reagan and Shannon Friedman, with the goal of efficiently covering key updates.

She provided an overview of the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), describing it as a multi-jurisdictional, collaborative, and proactive capital investment initiative aimed at accelerating progress toward environmental goals, known as thresholds. Since the program's inception, more than 800 projects have been completed, focusing on four primary areas:

- Watersheds and Water Quality – Efforts to protect and restore natural water systems.
- Sustainable Recreation and Transportation – Balancing public access with environmental conservation.

- Science, Stewardship, and Accountability – Using data-driven approaches to track and enhance environmental performance.
- Strategic Priority – Increasing the pace and scale of program implementation.

Ms. Caringer emphasized the importance of continued investment and collaboration, noting progress made in achieving key environmental thresholds, particularly in stream environment restoration. She previewed an upcoming overview by Shannon Friedman on project implementation and future threshold evaluations.

She then outlined the main components of the restoration and resilience strategic priority, which include:

1. Leading and convening the EIP partnership – TRPA has been working closely with more than 80 partners, including interagency executives, to prioritize and fund projects, track progress, and achieve tangible results.
2. Building sustainable funding strategies – The team has been actively securing financial resources, including through the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act and other funding sources, to support ongoing and future projects.
3. Expanding EIP communications and engagement – Increasing awareness and national support for the program, as evidenced by the successful Lake Tahoe Summit.

Ms. Caringer noted that since the last meeting, the team had been deeply engaged in strengthening the EIP partnership, working closely with federal, state, and local agencies to advance priority projects and funding strategies. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and continued investment to sustain and accelerate environmental progress in the Tahoe Basin.

Julie Regan, TRPA's Executive Director, provided an update on the significant progress made since the last trip to Washington, D.C., with a primary focus on the successful passage of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act in the U.S. House of Representatives. She began by celebrating this achievement, emphasizing the hard work of the board, the broader Tahoe community, and the "Team Tahoe" partnership in securing bipartisan support for the legislation.

She detailed the legislative journey of the Act, noting that while it may seem like a simple date extension (changing "2024" to "2034"), the process required persistent efforts over two Congressional sessions. Previously, the Act had passed through the Senate but stalled in the House. Learning from that experience, the team redoubled their efforts, introducing the bill over a year and a half ago and strategically preparing for its passage.

Ms. Regan highlighted the pivotal role of the Lake Tahoe Summit in galvanizing support, referring to it as a "forcing function" that unified stakeholders across political and state lines. With the Act set to expire on September 30, its renewal was crucial to ensuring that the remaining $300 million in authorized but unappropriated funds from the original $415 million allocation could still be secured over the next decade.

She credited Congressman Kevin Kiley (CA) and Congressman Mark Amodei (NV) for their leadership in pushing the bill forward. Kiley, in a bold move, announced at the Tahoe Summit his commitment to securing a hearing in the House Natural Resources Committee, which was instrumental in advancing the legislation. Following a successful committee hearing and markup, the bill quickly moved to a full House vote.

Ms. Regan shared the remarkable bipartisan nature of the bill's passage, noting that Chairman

Bruce Westerman (R) and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D) both spoke in support of Tahoe's environmental efforts. She underscored how Lake Tahoe's collaborative conservation model is being recognized as a national example of successful environmental stewardship and forest management.
She provided a personal reflection on watching the House vote in real-time from Roundhill Pines Beach, describing the surreal experience of seeing families enjoy the lake while Congress was voting to protect its future. She called it a "mission moment", symbolizing both the achievements and the work that still lies ahead.

Looking ahead, Ms. Regan expressed optimism about the bill's passage in the Senate and its upcoming presidential signing. She closed by thanking the board and stakeholders for their support, underscoring the importance of continued collaboration and advocacy for Tahoe's environmental future.

Kim Caringer highlighted TRPA's recent communications efforts to promote and document the progress of the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). She introduced a special edition of *Tahoe In Depth*, which was published to commemorate the recent legislative achievements and to showcase the extensive efforts of EIP partners. Normally, TRPA produces two editions per year, but this extra publication was a stretch goal set as part of the organization's strategic initiatives.

Ms. Caringer also mentioned the annual Accomplishments Report, which details major EIP projects—including those in planning, under implementation, or recently completed. This report provides a clear picture of progress and ongoing efforts in environmental conservation.

Additionally, she announced the launch of a new e-newsletter, *Profiles on Progress*, which aims to increase public awareness of EIP implementation efforts by highlighting real-world projects and their impact.

A key priority for the coming year will be a review of EIP branding and communications. While the EIP brand has strong recognition, having been established for 28 years, TRPA is committed to keeping it relevant by ensuring it resonates with new audiences. Ms. Caringer emphasized that updates to the logo and branding have occurred in the past, and TRPA will continue working with partners to refine and expand EIP's reach and provide the committee with updates on branding efforts will be shared in future meetings.

Shannon Friedman, TRPA Senior Planner, provided an overview of various environmental projects across four VIP focus areas, emphasizing their regional significance in achieving the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP) goals.

1. Forest Health Projects:
    - Over 94,000 acres of forest treated in the basin.
    - Highlighted projects include the Homewood Forest Reduction Project (252 acres of private land being treated) and the large-scale West Shore project led by the Forest Service.
    - Community wildfire protection plans are being updated.
    - Utility corridors are being cleared for fire prevention, and hazardous trees from the Caldor Fire are being removed.
2. Watersheds & Water Quality:
    - 840 miles of roadway treated to reduce stormwater pollution in Lake Tahoe.
    - Key projects include the South Lake Tahoe Valley Stormwater Project, Burke

Creek Restoration (22 acres of habitat restored), and the Upper Truckee Watershed Restoration, which includes multiple phases.
    - The Motel 6 property acquisition by the California Tahoe Conservancy marks a major milestone in restoration efforts.
3. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Control:
    - Over 113,000 boats inspected, successfully preventing new AIS introductions.
    - 332 acres treated for AIS removal.
    - Key projects include the Tailac AIS Removal (17 acres of bottom barriers), Tahoe Keys Control Method Test, and permanent AIS inspection stations at Spooner Summit and in California.
4. Sustainable Recreation & Transportation:
    - 198 miles of bike and pedestrian facilities built, with 3,386 feet of public shoreline added.
    - Highlighted projects include the Pioneer Trail roundabout, South Tahoe Greenway, and corridor improvements along State Routes 28 & 89.
    - Fanny Bridge replacement and Cal Complete Streets initiative are also progressing.
5. Science & Accountability:
    - Focus on scientific research, community engagement, and innovative technology.
    - Private sector contributions include environmental cleanup tools like beach litter collection bots.

She concluded with a status update on previously approved EIP projects, emphasizing continued progress and the importance of these initiatives in meeting long-term environmental goals.

Committee Member Questions/Comments

Ashley Conrad-Saydah asked for clarification on the 94,000 acres of activity mentioned, specifically requesting the time horizon for that figure and which specific acres are included.

Shannon Friedman responded that the work referenced has been done since the inception of the Environmental Improvement Program in 1997.

Ashley Conrad-Saydah asked about the criteria for defining the boundaries of individual projects, given their varying sizes. She also inquired whether "cutting green tape" could involve aggregating multiple projects into a larger whole to streamline environmental review.

Shannon Friedman explained that project size is often determined by land ownership, geography, and financial feasibility. For example, bike trail projects are broken into smaller, achievable segments. Regarding "cutting green tape," she acknowledged that combining projects for environmental review can be beneficial in some cases, but in others, handling projects individually is more efficient. The decision is made on a case-by-case basis to maximize efficiency.

Ashley Conrad-Saydah encouraged considering common landscape features in environmental reviews. She suggested finding ways to communicate recurring characteristics across multiple projects to streamline the review process. By leveraging past mitigation efforts, projects could potentially gain public support, secure additional funding, and reduce costs per acre or mile through aggregation.

Chairwoman Faustinos praised the accomplishments, particularly in cutting the green tape. She expressed appreciation for the work done, calling it impressive, and thanked the team.

III. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE DIRECTION TO STAFF ON THE 2023 THRESHOLD EVALUATION PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

Dan Segan, TRPA Chief Science and Policy Advisor, presented an overview of the 2023 Threshold Evaluation Process and Schedule. He provided a brief reminder of threshold standards, which are established under the Bi-State Compact and serve as key environmental benchmarks for the Tahoe Basin. The evaluation includes 10 broad categories with 148 standards, and it assesses progress in achieving and maintaining these benchmarks.

He explained that the threshold evaluation occurs every four years, compiling data to summarize progress and challenges. The 2023 evaluation, the eighth of its kind, continues efforts to improve accessibility by using dashboards rather than lengthy reports. The assessment measures whether standards are met and identifies trends—whether conditions are improving, stable, or declining.

Mr. Segan highlighted the collaborative nature of the process, emphasizing the reliance on partners for data collection due to funding limitations. The agency has been working on the evaluation throughout the year, with peer reviews taking place from August through October, aiming for a draft release in November.

He outlined the next steps, emphasizing the importance of using the evaluation to inform decision-making rather than letting it sit idle. A key part of this is a proposed four-stage engagement process, which includes listening sessions with stakeholders, synthesis of input, public review of recommendations, and incorporation of findings into agency and partner work plans.

Finally, he noted four main areas where feedback is sought: evaluation accuracy, strengths and weaknesses in threshold categories, policy recommendations, and research priorities. He welcomed feedback on the process and was available for questions.

Committee Member Questions/Comments

Ashley Conrad-Saydah expressed appreciation for the thorough report and the committee's ongoing efforts. She highlighted the importance of aligning public outreach and feedback processes with the increasing speed of data collection and digitization. She suggested summarizing key takeaways at the start of each meeting to facilitate iterative feedback integration. Regarding the regional plan, she emphasized that updates should reflect evolving conditions, costs, and demographics without requiring a full reopening of the plan. She recommended communicating this as an ongoing, adaptive process while still defining clear milestones. Finally, she acknowledged the challenges faced by a small staff and cautioned against undue pressure while striving for efficiency.

Chairwoman Faustinos expressed appreciation for the public participation process and the collaborative approach to developing next steps. She supported the previous comments made and emphasized the significance of acknowledging this new outlook and process as the committee moves forward with its work.

Public Comment

Gavin Feiger, representing League to Save Lake Tahoe, emphasized the importance of integrating thresholds into planning approvals and project prioritization. He appreciated the presentation and the discussion on how thresholds can better guide project approvals. Mr. Feiger reiterated the need to ensure that projects are not approved solely based on allowance but must contribute to improving threshold performance and meeting regional plan benchmarks. He highlighted challenges with Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) thresholds and the lessons learned, advocating for their application in future updates. Mr. Feiger encouraged accelerating the threshold update process and expressed commitment to collaborating with staff and the committee to support these efforts.

Maureen Daggett, a lifelong resident of Tahoe Meadows, expressed concern over the ongoing removal of natural debris, which she believes is negatively impacting the environment. She urged TRPA to issue a policy statement on the matter. Ms. Daggett emphasized that removing organic material, such as yard waste, disrupts the natural ecosystem by depleting soil nutrients, harming vegetation, and affecting wildlife. She cited support from Chad Hanson of the John Muir Project, warning that excessive removal has led to muddy, degraded meadows in South Tahoe. She also cautioned that disturbed soil and dust could carry phosphorus and nitrogen into the lake, potentially triggering an algae bloom. Ms. Daggett stressed the urgency of addressing this issue before further environmental harm occurs.

Kristina Hill, a land use planner with 45 years of experience in the Tahoe Basin, expressed her appreciation for the update to the thresholds. However, she emphasized the importance of ensuring that when the agency amends its code of ordinances or regional plan, it provides clear findings that demonstrate thresholds will be maintained and not exceeded. She pointed out that, in the past, such findings have often been lacking, and there has been insufficient evidence to show that projects or amendments would not cumulatively impact the thresholds. Ms. Hill stressed the need for maintaining the thresholds during implementation.

IV. UPCOMING TOPICS

Kim Caringer provided an overview of upcoming topics, noting that most of them had already been covered in Shannon and Dan's presentations. She highlighted that updates on project implementation and the EIP (Environmental Improvement Program) will continue to be shared with the committee. Caringer mentioned that the public engagement process, as presented by Dan, is still in its early stages of design, and they will seek feedback on the timeline and the rollout of public engagement sessions. She emphasized the importance of committee engagement in the evaluation process and expressed excitement about receiving feedback.

V. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

VI. PUBLIC INTEREST COMMENTS

None.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Williamson moved to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Katherine Huston
Paralegal, TRPA

The above meeting was recorded in its entirety. Anyone wishing to listen to the recording may find it at https://www.TRPA.gov/meeting-materials/. In addition, written documents submitted at the meeting are available for review. If you require assistance locating this information, please contact the TRPA at (775) 588-4547 or virtualmeetinghelp@TRPA.gov.